

## Respecting Religious Diversity

This pamphlet provides answers to commonly asked questions about religious accommodations in the workplace and in housing.

It is good business to respect and accommodate religious diversity. Making reasonable religious accommodations can lead to greater employee and tenant satisfaction.

The Seattle Office for Civil Rights handles charges of religious discrimination in the City of Seattle.

If you think you have been discriminated against or have questions about this or other discrimination issues, please call our office at (206) 684-4500 or visit our website at [www.seattle.gov/civilrights/](http://www.seattle.gov/civilrights/).

## Resources

### Hate Free Zone

[www.hatefreezone.org](http://www.hatefreezone.org)

(206) 723-2203

Information on civil liberties, hate crimes, discrimination and immigration reform.

### Arab American Community Coalition

[www.theaacc.org](http://www.theaacc.org)

(206) 634-9001

Hotline to report a hate incident, crime, or harassment. Confidential support in Arabic or English.

### ACLU of Washington Foundation

[www.aclu-wa.org](http://www.aclu-wa.org)

(206) 624-2184

Free legal information and referral.

### Anti-Defamation League

[www.adl.org](http://www.adl.org)

(206) 448-5349

Information on religious freedoms and hate crimes.

### Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

[www.eeoc.gov](http://www.eeoc.gov)

Enforces federal laws prohibiting job discrimination.

### U.S. Department of Justice

[www.usdoj.gov](http://www.usdoj.gov)

Enforces federal laws prohibiting discrimination.

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# Seattle Office for Civil Rights

## Religious Accommodations

### Employment & Housing



## In Housing

***I am Sikh and wear a turban. A landlord told me that there were no vacancies. Later the same day, the landlord told other people that there were units available. Is this legal?***

It is illegal to discriminate against prospective tenants simply based on their religion. While it is possible that units became available during the day, the landlord's actions do raise questions. If you believe that the landlord gave you false information based on your religion, contact the Seattle Office for Civil Rights at 206-684-4500.

***My apartment complex has a community room for special events and parties. We wanted to reserve the room for a small Bible study group, but my landlord wouldn't allow it. Later, our neighbor reserved the room for a birthday party. What can we do?***

Your landlord cannot discriminate against you simply based on your religion or religious practices. A landlord can decide that a community room may not be used for any private purposes. If the room is available to tenants for private activities, all tenants must be granted the same privileges, including use for religious purposes. If your landlord refuses to allow this, contact the Seattle Office for Civil Rights to explore your options under the law.

***I was evicted from my apartment for burning candles, which are part of my religious practice. Other tenants burn candles in their apartments. I believe the landlord discriminated against me based on religion. Is this against the law?***

It may be. You cannot be evicted based on your religion – but there may be other issues involved. Contact the Seattle Office for Civil Rights to discuss your situation.

## In the Workplace

***During my job interview, the employer asked me if I am a Christian. I told her I am Hindu. Can she refuse to hire me because of my religion?***

No. It is against the law for employers to discriminate on the basis of religion against employees or applicants when hiring or firing. In Seattle, the law applies to companies and organizations with one or more employees. This law does not apply to religious institutions.

***I'm not Buddhist, but I'm applying for a groundskeeper job at a local Buddhist temple. Can they deny me a job simply because I'm not Buddhist?***

Yes. Federal laws regarding religious discrimination do not apply to religious institutions. Many religious institutions, however, have open hiring policies and employ people of other faiths.

***Is an employer allowed not to hire me because I wear a hijab, or to tell me I can't wear it during work?***

Employers must accommodate employees' religious practices and dress unless they can show that doing so would cause undue business hardship. An employer can show undue hardship if an accommodation would require more than ordinary administrative costs, diminish efficiency in other jobs, infringe on other employees' job rights or benefits, impair workplace safety, cause co-workers to carry the accommodated employee's share of potentially hazardous or burdensome work, or conflict with another law or regulation.

***I am Muslim and pray five times each day. Can my boss fire me because I need to take a break to pray during my shift at work?***

Your employer must reasonably accommodate your religious observances and practices unless s/he can prove that doing so will cause an undue hardship on the business.

Once you ask for an accommodation, your employer must take reasonable steps to help you avoid conflicts between your religious duties and work responsibilities.

Common accommodations may include:

- Flexible scheduling, working through lunch, and work breaks
- Floating or optional holidays
- Permitting employees to make up time lost due to religious observance
- Voluntary substitutions and swaps of shifts, assignments, etc.
- Lateral transfers and/or changes of job assignment
- Modifying workplace practices, policies, and procedures

***My co-worker sent me e-mails that contain offensive jokes about my religion. Is there anything I can do to stop it?***

Yes. Your company is responsible for maintaining a harassment-free workplace. Talk to your supervisor if you feel your co-worker's behavior has created an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment. If the situation is not resolved, contact our office to discuss your options under the law.